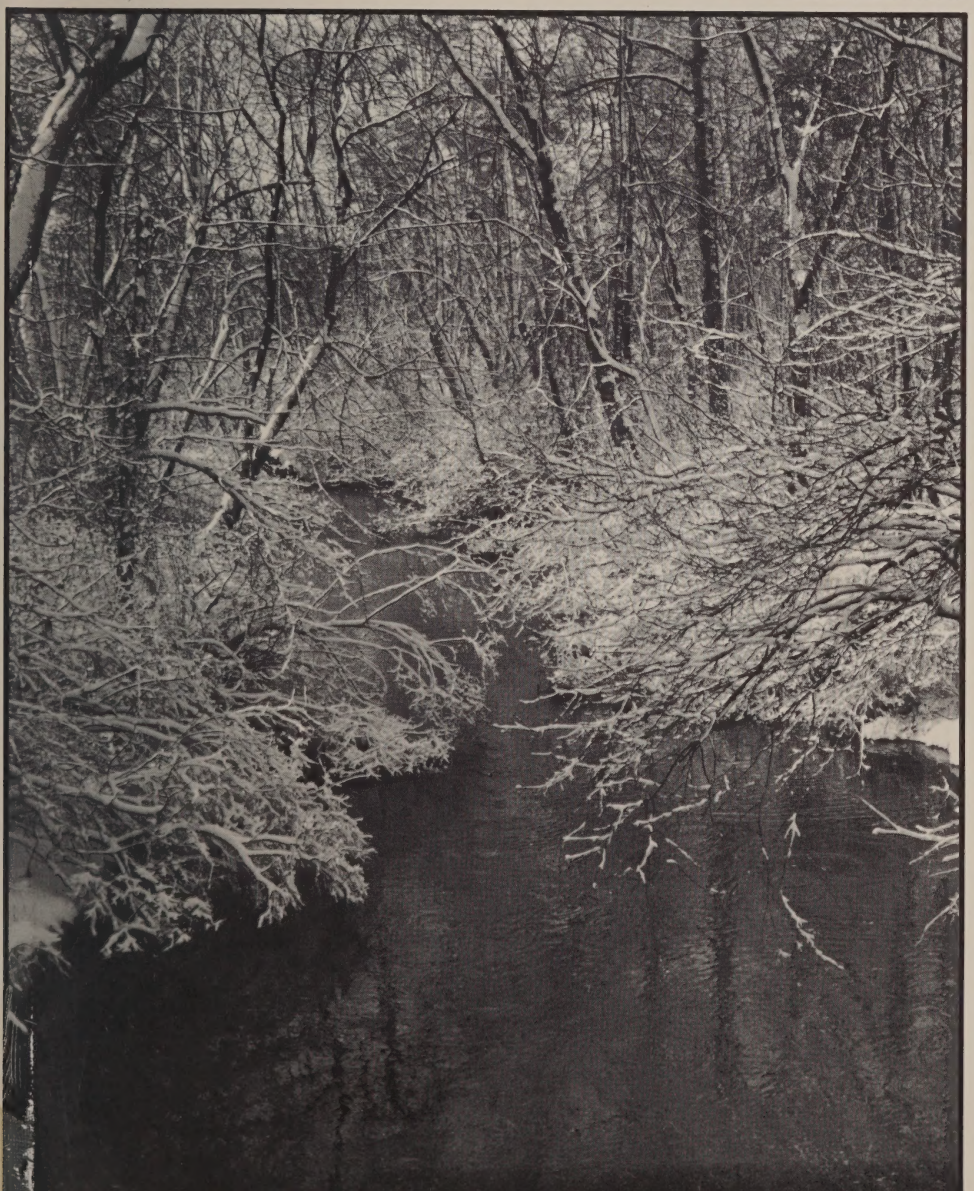
FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

Volume 41, No. 6 December 1990



Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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Shaker Tree of Life • Spirit Drawing

JOY to the WORLD

My wish for you:

Be at peace

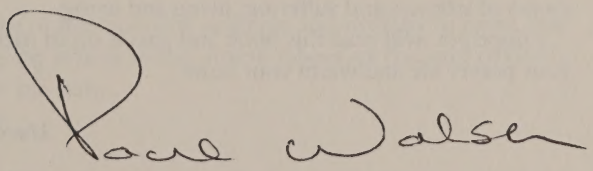
and in harmony

with yourself

and all of Creation

this happy and sacred

holiday season.



Day by day, week by week, and year by year, a physician next door to our office is praying for his patients, and they are praying for him. Now he has written a book that I found deeply inspiring, and I would like to recommend it to you: *A Physician's Witness to the Power of Shared Prayer*, by Dr. William F. Haynes, Jr. (Loyola University Press: Chicago, 1990). Dr. Haynes is senior attending physician in the Department of Internal Medicine and Cardiology at the Medical Center in Princeton, NJ.

Interwoven with stories of healing and reconciliation is the poignant story of his own spiritual journey, which begins with his mother's faith and love and travels over "steep hills" of personal loss and suffering to conclude in mature religious commitment. A passage that he quotes from *Reflections* by the Swiss physician, Paul Tournier, expresses Dr. Haynes' own belief that God has been calling him, and calls each of us, every step of the way:

> God guides us despite our uncertainties and our vagueness, even through our failings and mistakes. . . . Only afterwards, as we look back over the way we have come and reconsider certain important moments in our lives in the light of all that has followed them, or when we survey the whole progress of our lives do we experience the feeling of having been led without knowing it, the feeling that God has mysteriously guided us.

In a day when advanced medical technology has distanced many physicians from their patients, Dr. Haynes has found a way to reach out his hand across the gap and relate to the deep spiritual nature of the people in his care. Gentle and compassionate—never superior—he is one of those rare people who occasionally come along to remind us that God is everywhere, always offering love and comfort, even in the darkest moments of sickness and suffering, living and dying.

I hope you will read this book and pass it on to friends. It will enrich your prayer life and warm your heart.

Mary Ford-Grabowsky

"Help us to find God," the disciples asked the elder.
"No one can help you do that," the elder said.
"Why not?" the disciples asked amazed.
"For the same reason that no one can help fish to find the ocean."
Source Unknown

For I have found a joy that is full and more than full.
Anselm of Canterbury

"But how is this to be accomplished?" "Cut away everything."
Plotinus

O God, who by love alone are great and glorious, you are present and live with us by love alone: grant us likewise by love to attain another self, by love to live in others, and by love to come to our glory, to see and accompany your love throughout eternity.
Thomas Traherne

We must praise Your goodness that You have left nothing undone to draw us to Yourself.
Ludwig von Beethoven

God give me work
Till my life shall end
And life
Till my work is done.
Winifred Holtby

To pray in the midst of the mundane is simply and strongly to assert that this dull and tiring day is holy and its simple labors are the stuff of God's saving presence for me now.
Joan Chittister

Prayer looks out all the time towards God and stretches towards God with desire. Jeremy Taylor describes it wonderfully when he says: "Prayer is only the body of the soul. Desires are its wings!"
Evelyn Underhill

Prayers and Songs

ELIZABETH DODSON GRAY

Many of us today share a deep concern for the future of the earth. Yet many of us continue also to pray within classic prayer structures which do not include the earth among our prayer-concerns. I would like to share with the large network of Fellowship in Prayer *some parts of my meditative life which try to express the awe and wonder we experience before the majesty of God's creation. It is my hope that this prayer, this pledge, and these songs can help all of us bring our connection to the earth into our daily prayer life.*

A Prayer

We stand today among trees and grass and flowers
to call our souls into the worship
of God the Creator of heaven and earth.
It is hard to pull ourselves away
from the busyness of our schedules,
and to allow our souls to relax
and romp in awe and wonder
before the mysteries of creation.

You have said to us "Be still, and know that I am God."

And as the silence enfolds us
we would open our inner *ears* to hear
the silent sounds of trees growing,
of flowers opening,
of plants doing their incredible photosynthesis,
and producing food for all that lives.

We would also listen inwardly to hear
all the silent sounds of natural growth and harmony,
children growing, trees stretching skyward, adults mellowing,
the ill recovering their vigor.

* * * * *

We would also open our inner *eyes*,
to see the silent drift of clouds across a
vast universe of 193 billion galaxies;
to ponder the thousands of millions of years of geologic time
in which God our Creator has been fashioning this finite earth.

* * * * *

And the voice of God comes to us,
as it came to Moses long ago by a burning bush, saying:
"Take off your shoes;
The earth on which you stand is holy ground,
for I have hallowed it with my care and compassion
since time began."

* * * * *

Forgive us, O God, when we have eyes and do not see the beauty of
your creation.

Forgive us, O God, when we have ears and to not hear the wondrous
music of heavenly spheres,
not to mention the birds beneath our own windows.

Forgive us our poverty of the senses,
and the shallowness of our sense of awe,
and our misunderstanding of value as we put a dollar sign on your
other species, even as we destroy them.

* * * * *

Your whole universe, O God, is a burning bush.
It calls us to turn aside, to pay attention,
to see and hear and sense—
and to wonder and to praise.

Grant us new eyes, new ears, and newly awakened hearts;
to know that our earth, this green and precious planet,
is holy ground.
Help us to enter into your courts of nature
and praise your holy presence here.
AMEN.

A Commitment to Walk Lightly on the Earth

I commit myself, for this day and hereafter,
to attune myself to the wondrous natural process of creation
within which the Creator God has placed us.

I commit myself to pay attention to the sun
and the wind and the rain,
all of which nourish my body in its physical being,
and make possible the food and water and air
that in turn make my life possible.

I commit myself to respect the natural cycles
of nitrogen, carbon, oxygen, phosphorous,
and the rest,
which circulate so quietly and invisibly,
making human life on this earth possible:
"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given."

I commit myself to honor the diversity
of plant and animal species,
evolved through thousands of ages in your sight,
forming the complex communities of life we participate in.

I commit myself to examine my own ways
and those of my culture,
so I can recognize—and avoid—
what invades and destroys this web of life.

I commit myself to turn away from anything which tramples
upon these delicate webs of life-support.
I will turn away from all the ways of destruction,
the ways of domination and exploitation,
of dominion and control.
I pledge myself to work within my part of human culture
to change all of these destructive patterns.

I commit myself to be faithful and persistent
in amending and updating
my personal lifestyle and that of my family.
I will attend also to my lifestyle at work and at play,
in my business and in my recreation.

My goal is to be a gentle and grateful participant in God's creation, to "walk more lightly upon the earth."

I commit myself to meditate on these things in my prayer life, as an aid to attuning myself to the mystery and wonder of creation.

* * * * *

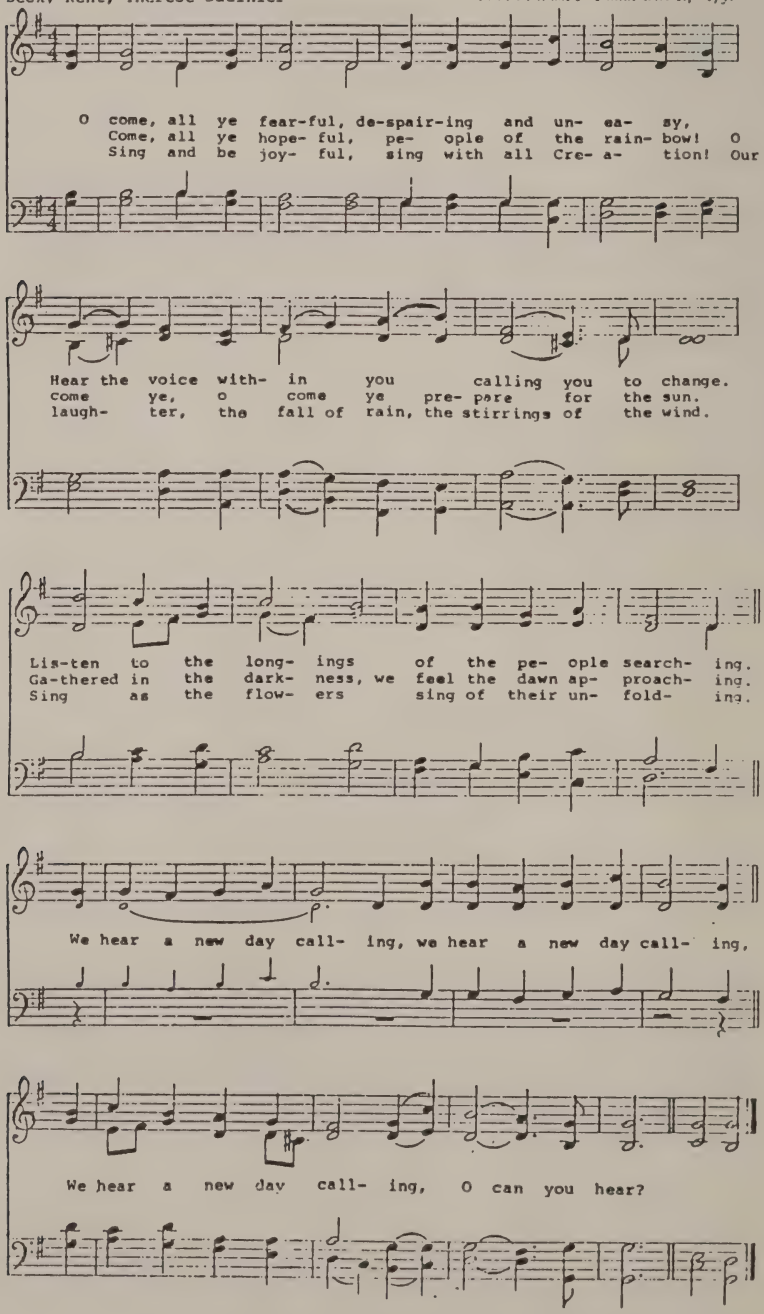
Two Songs to Sing

There is a long tradition of setting familiar tunes to new words for new occasions. "JOY TO US ALL" *has new words to become an ecological carol to celebrate the earth.* "O COME ALL YE HOPEFUL" *gives another familiar Christmas carol new words to express our hope for the future. They follow on the next two pages.*

After graduating from Smith College and Yale Divinity School, Elizabeth Dodson Gray taught at MIT, Boston College and Willams College. An internationally heralded writer, environmentalist, and futurist, she is currently Director of the Bolton Institute for a Sustainable Future and Coordinator of the Theological Opportunities Program at Harvard Divinity School. In 1989 the national Film Board of Canada released a film, "Adam's World," about her work. Among Ms. Dodson's books are Green Paradise Lost *and* Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience.

O COME, ALL YE HOPEFUL

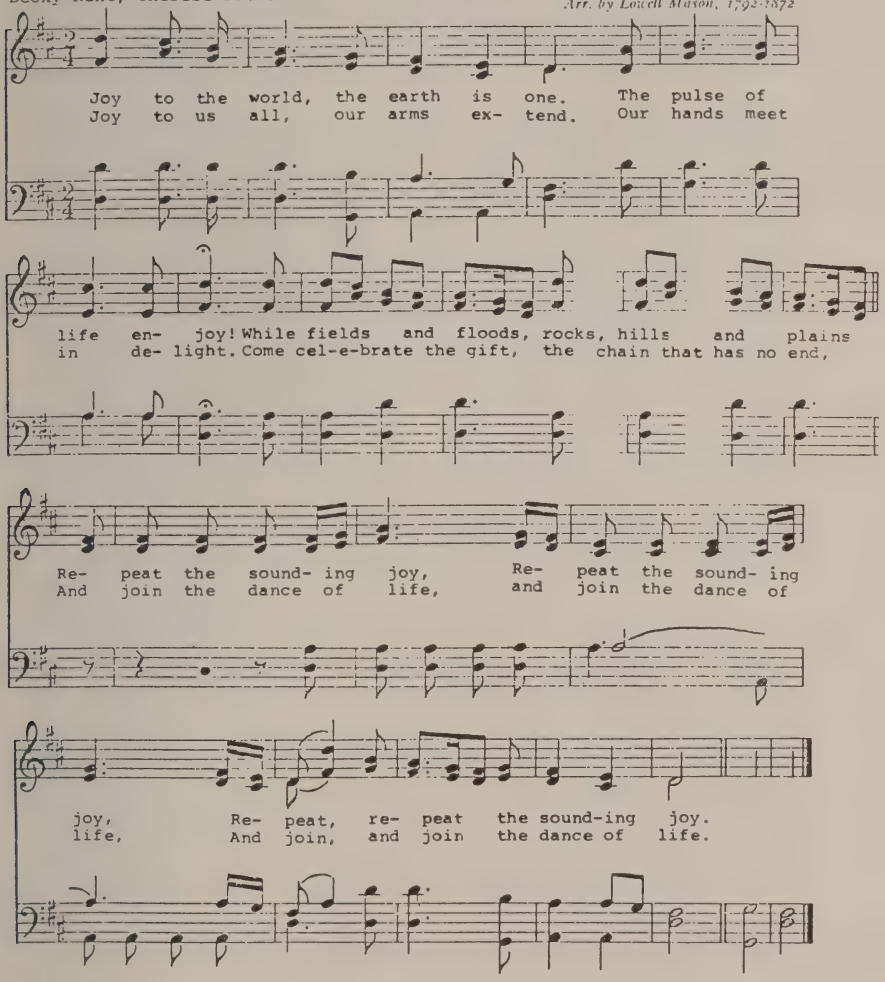
Doug Lipman, Elizabeth Dodson Gray
Becky Kent, Therese Saulnier

ADESTE FIDELES *Irregular*
John F. Wade's "Cantus Diversi," 1751

O come, all ye fear-ful, de-spair-ing and un- ea- sy,
Come, all ye hope- ful, pe- ople of the rain- bow! O
Sing and be joy- ful, sing with all Cre- a- tion! Our
Hear the voice with- in you calling you to change.
come ye, o come ye pre- pare for the sun.
laugh- ter, the fall of rain, the stirrings of the wind.
Lis-ten to the long- ings of the pe- ople search- ing.
Ga-thered in the dark- ness, we feel the dawn ap- proach- ing.
Sing as the flow- ers sing of their un- fold- ing.
We hear a new day call- ing, we hear a new day call- ing,
We hear a new day call- ing, O can you hear?

JOY TO US ALL!

Doug Lipman, Elizabeth Dodson Gray
Becky Kent, Therese Saulnier

ANTIOCH C.M.
Attr. to Georg F. Handel, 1685-1759
Arr. by Lowell Mason, 1792-1872


Joy to the world, the earth is one. The pulse of
Joy to us all, our arms ex- tend. Our hands meet
life en- joy! While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
in de- light. Come cel-e-brate the gift, the chain that has no end,
Re- peat the sound- ing joy, Re- peat the sound- ing
And join the dance of life, and join the dance of
joy, Re- peat, re- peat the sound-ing joy.
life, And join, and join the dance of life.

Why Try?

THOMAS KEATING

For this former Abbot, every failure is a success!

Spiritual achievement is generally based on three stages—human effort, apparent failure, the triumph of God. If there is no effort, there will be no experience of failure. And if there is no experience of failure, there is no adequate realization that the gift of divine life is totally gratuitous. We must learn by experience that there is no causal equation between personal effort and the results.

I attended a grammar school where, along with intellectual formation, there was a rather sophisticated athletic program. In charge of the program was a director affectionately known as "Chief." In this program, there were a variety of contests, such as rope-climbing, pole-climbing, running and standing broad jump, high jump, sprinting, etc. For each of these events the young athletes received a number of points, and at the end of the year the winner received a handsome silver loving cup. After being allowed to hold the loving cup for a few moments of triumph, his name was inscribed on it, and the cup was replaced in the archives.

One of the most exciting events was the rope-climbing contest. The muscular or wiry kids could shoot to the top in a few seconds. We received ten points if we could go up in ten seconds; we would get 100 points if we could shoot to the top in three seconds. There was one young man who was very bright and very overweight. He was not at all athletic and had absolutely no chance of climbing the rope. In fact, for his event, he didn't even bother to loosen his necktie and open his collar. He would step forward, grasp the rope, dangle his feet, and hang there helplessly, becoming very red in the face. Meanwhile his buddies, who were jealous of his attainments in the classroom, would take their revenge. Several would yell out, "Hurry up, Joe! You're doing great!"

One day this contest had come around again on the schedule. One by

Thomas Keating studied at Yale and Fordham Universities before entering the Cistercian (Trappist) Order in 1944. Abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, MA, for 20 years, he now resides at St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, CO. Among his books on the spiritual life are The Heart of the World *and* Open Mind, Open Heart. *A longer version of his article appeared in* Impressions *as "The Relationship Between Personal Effort and Grace."*

"Meditation is a commitment to wait for any length of time without giving up. It brings with it the most intimate experience of failure. Do you think it's a failure in the eyes of the One of the other side of the door? At some moment the door will open and you will slip inside into a kind of fourth dimension of reality."

one the boys were called on and shimmied to the top with varying speeds. Chief had a stop watch in hand and was smoking one of his big cigars. Eventually he called out Joe's name. Joe didn't move. There was silence. Chief said, "It's your turn, Joe." Joe replied, "I don't think I'll try it today." Laughter peeled forth from dozens of throats. Chief was a shrewd observer of human nature, especially of young adolescents. He took a big puff on his cigar, and with an air of great largesse, said, "Joe, I'll give you one point for trying." One point for trying! Here were his companions, piling up fifty, eighty, a hundred points, and Joe was being offered one miserable point for facing certain failure. Who could blame him for wanting to sit this one out?

But Joe got up, stepped forward, and grabbed the rope. He dangled his legs helplessly, got red in the face, huffed and puffed. His classmates, jeered, booed, and whistled. At last Chief said, "That will do." Joe slunk back to his place as Chief, with a great flourish of his pen, put one point after his name. That's all he got from Chief . . . How many points would you have given him?

How do you suppose God would have rated Joe's performance if God had been keeping the score? Here is a suggestion. If there is a "one" after your name, God can take a pencil and start adding zeroes. Thus, you might end up with 1,000, 100,000, 1,000,000 or 1,000,000,000 points. On the other hand, if there is no "one"—no one point for trying—there are only zeroes, no matter how many zeroes God may add.

This story is like the account in Luke's Gospel about the widow's mite. One day Jesus was looking at people making their contributions at the entrance of the temple in Jerusalem. The rich folk were putting in big stuff and the coffers were beginning to fill up. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, a widow who had nothing to live on approached the coffer. She put in two mites—less than a penny. And Jesus said, "This woman has put in more than all the others."

This is a complete shift in value systems. It turns our ideas upside down and challenges the very meaning of success. It also challenges our idea of what effort is. The widow's coins were so small, they didn't make

Tom Dunham

any noise. No one noticed her gift except Jesus, and there is no evidence that he congratulated her for her generosity. As far as we know, she just walked away. True virtue is unaware of itself. That's why efforts that bring about a sense of satisfaction for our achievements on the spiritual level are leading in the wrong direction. The right kind of efforts bear no proportion to the results. They teach us that the divine life is sheer gift. On the other hand, you can never get it without trying, because trying is saying to God, "Won't you please give me what I don't have and can't possibly achieve by myself?"

This is why failure in our own eyes is essential in our spiritual journey. Perhaps it would be better to say apparent failure, because there is a sense in which every effort is a success, for every effort receives "one" point for trying. But such effort doesn't seem like success; at least, it's not the kind of success that we expect and desire. When we give up what we envisage as success, our idea of the spiritual journey, even our idea of God, we find what we are looking for because we have been freed from making the wrong kinds of effort. The right kind of effort leaves the results to God. When we accept failure, it's only a matter of time for the triumph of God. It's as certain as the existence of God. Divine love never fails.

The regular practice of contemplative prayer is one of the great ways of making the "right effort"; it's a way to open ourselves to the Ultimate Mystery and to be transformed by divine love. Most people who seriously pursue contemplative prayer in any of the great traditions will enter into the same kind of frustration that Joe felt, trying and not getting any results—in the case of prayer, trying to be quiet and being doused with thoughts. There is no way of turning on the experience of divine love or opening a door into the divine presence. Contemplation is like sitting outside a closed door which only opens from the inside. By means of a sacred word or some simple image, one gently knocks on the door. The fact that we are waiting is the most important element, but there must also be some movement to let the One on the other side know that we are waiting. A sacred word, a mantra or some other method of entering into interior silence is like a gentle knock which says, "I'm still here, waiting; I'm not going away." This requires patience to the nth degree.

Patience is the determination to wait, which is not so much effort as consent. Sometimes it takes all the guts we've got when we're barraged with distractions. It is like going to a doctor's office and waiting for hours. After awhile, even if we have a toothache, we get up and go out, saying "There's no point to this." The practice of contemplative prayer is a commitment to wait for any length of time without giving up. It brings with it the most intimate experience of failure. Do you think it's a failure in the eyes of the One on the other side of the interior door? At some moment the door will open and you will slip inside into a kind of fourth dimension of reality.

In all forms of effort, there is the risk of pride, the feeling that we have accomplished something. If we experience a moment of tranquility, something in us says, "Aha, now I'm getting someplace. I'm climbing the rope like Joe's friends . . ." But we aren't climbing any rope. It is the sheer compassion of God that is reaching down to us, identifying with us, holding us like a mother hugging her child.

Everyone likes to be accepted as one is, and God is no exception. God doesn't want to be treated as if God were only what we think, or what our friends think or what some expert thinks. No expression of faith can fully express all that God is: all such expressions are only pointers, ways of expressing the inexpressible. In contemplative prayer, we leave aside all thoughts, even the good ones, and accept God as is. Along with that capacity comes the ability to accept ourselves as we are. The purpose of

the spiritual journey is not only to become a better human being, but to become a divine human being—God's idea of what a human being is. God looks for the right kind of effort, a willingness to fail in our own eyes, and invincible trust in infinite mercy.

FAILURE NEED NOT BE WEAKNESS; TO FAIL TO TRY IS WEAKNESS. IF, DESPITE YOUR ALL-OUT EFFORT IN ANYTHING, YOU FAIL TO SUCCEED, NO HARM; CARRY ON; DON'T STOP! THAT UNBLEMISHED EFFORT MUST CARRY YOU TOWARD THE GOAL.

SRI SRI THAKUR

The Divine Breath

WAYNE TEASDALE

A Benedictine monk gathers mystical insights from Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism to show that—as Tagore said—"God is the breath of all breath."

The reality and presence of the Divine can be as obvious as the wind or the air we breathe, indeed even the act of breathing itself. It's almost too obvious, certainly so for our highly rational, scientifically and technologically oriented American mind, which is so incredibly complex, a complexity increased by the super-computer and every other advance. It requires simplicity and openness not only to entertain this possibility, but more essentially, to experience its truth. Such openness and simplicity awaken our spiritual senses, as does meditation or any deep prayer discipline. When we are awake in this way we become very sensitive to the more subtle levels of life, and conscious of transcendent realities that our cultural conditioning prevents us from encountering. Because God often comes in the simple, the obvious and the ordinary—though this ordinary is actually quite extraordinary—and we are accustomed to the complex, the abstract and the practical, we miss God. We're barking up the wrong tree, not seeing what is right in front of us or all around us, since we fail to regard things in that fresh, childlike manner, that innocent way leading into the heart of the mystery of God. That is why God's Presence in the wind and in the breath so often goes unnoticed.

The complexity of our civilization, a complexity whose content is drawn from the conditions of contemporary life, remote from the more simple conditions that exist in the natural world, is reinforced daily by the TV and the whole entertainment media. TV not only reinforces the complexity of our basically fragmented existence, where one aspect of a person's life is in conflict with another, it also dulls the capacity for depth and a more subtle kind of seeing and feeling, the kind that allows one to experience God in new ways.

To experience the Divine in the wind or the breath is one of these

The author of Essays in Mysticism, Toward a Christian Vedanta, *and many other books and articles, Wayne Teasdale is interested in a universal spirituality that will unite the East and the West. He resides at Hundred Acres Monastery in New Boston, NH.*

ways. I remember how a wonderful uncle of mine, John Cosgrove, would on occasion quote to me the stanza of a poem by Christina Rosetti. This stanza captures somewhat the mystery of the wind and what it signifies, or perhaps more accurately, *is*.

> Who has seen the wind?
> Neither you nor I.
> But when the trees
> bow down their heads
> we know it's passing by.

Uncle John would recite this poetic fragment whenever we spoke of the wind as God or identified it with God. It seems at times that when one hears the wind shaking the trees and tapping against windows, or more profoundly, when one is surrounded by it while walking, standing or just sitting, that the wind is a presence, or *the* Presence.

Most of the ancient cultures have grasped the inner connection existing among the Spirit, breath, wind and life; these were often interchangeable terms. The Greek word for Spirit, or *pneuma*—related directly to the Hebrew word *ruah*, which it translates—means all of these. Genesis mentions how God gave life to Adam (humanity) by breathing "into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2.7). This is the divine *ruah*, meaning both wind and breath, which conveys life. God's *ruah*, God's Spirit, Breath or Wind, when it is active, expresses God's inner reality and nature, something that is not external to God.

Similarly, in the Gospel of John, Jesus communicates his Spirit through an act of breathing on the disciples, and this Spirit allows them to be channels of new life by forgiving sins (John 20.22). Because they have the Holy Spirit, God's breath or *ruah*, they also have the basis of spiritual or godly life, a life associated with holiness and freedom from sin.

Likewise, in Hinduism, the Divine or Cosmic Breath was known from the dawn of this tradition. It is recorded in the Rig-Veda how the "One breathed without breath, by its own impulse" (Rig-Veda X,129, 2), before creation. At that "time" there was just the eternal act of the Divine silently, peacefully breathing, wherein all was implicit. Out of this primordial act of breathing all things came forth into being. It is a very mysterious process.

In some forms of Buddhist meditation, notably in Vipassana, emphasis is placed on the breath, that is concentration on or awareness of the

Cliff Moore

act of breathing. This meditative discipline seems to spark a deep realization of the mystery of existence, especially in relation to the ultimate state of reality. Concentration on the breath in meditation can quickly recollect the mind, and bring one into an experiential knowledge of how the act of breathing is intimately connected with the essence of being. Hindu, Buddhist and Christian practitioners of meditation know that *prana* or the breath is a key to mystical consciousness, that it can and does, propel one into it.

Sometimes when one is waking up in the morning, whether within meditation or not, while sitting, reclining or reading etc., when there is sufficient quiet and stillness, one becomes vividly conscious of another presence breathing. This breathing Presence is the Divine or Cosmic Spirit, the Breath of God. It is a hidden Presence made evident only by this profound quality of the breathing. Until we discover and become accustomed to it, it seems vague, but later it assumes a more definite reality for us.

In time, perceiving the Divine Breathing becomes an effortless matter. You simply have to be quiet. If you are quiet, and if there is sufficient quiet around you—enough to hear the stillness—then it is possible to also hear this mystical breathing. It may emanate from a tree, the ceiling, near a wall, a table or a chair, or it may completely surround you, but you cannot ignore it. Although it seems to come and go, it's really always present. To be known experientially it requires only a natural stillness and our attention.

The Divine Breathing is different from the human or animal form of breathing; it's far more subtle. It's more like an energy; like the ebb and flow of the ocean that rhythmically rises and falls in a steady cadence. The Divine Breath we can perceive has a tranquil sound; it's never harsh or irregular, not violent, nor causing fear or concern. Always it makes its hearer(s) more gentle, peaceful and totally receptive to God's Presence. It draws one ever deeper into itself by bringing one into a deeper contact with it.

At a certain point, the Spirit's Breathing completely encompasses you. You and the Breathing are united in the Divine Energy itself. You realize that not only is God breathing all around you, God is breathing you into each moment. St. Ignatius of Loyola says that God loves us into being. This is literally true, for God breathes us into being out of His own substance. Our act of breathing participates in God's, and *is* God's. We don't

own our own breath, just as we don't own our bodies. Everything is gift. The statement of St. Paul, "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17.28), is quite accurate; the spiritual phenomenon of the Divine Breath indicates this truth in an eloquently simple sort of way.

The same can be said of inspiration. It is actually *in-spiration*, since the inspired person feels or experiences the Divine Spirit pouring into him or her, affecting that person's powers by expanding them; stimulating creativity; granting intuitions and insights usually not easily accessible to the rational mind. In these experiences one is "in-spired," for the Spirit *breathes* into us and communicates the gifts appropriate to our particular work—be it writing, poetry, artistic or musical composition, organizing some project or carrying out some charitable task. The Divine Spirit is the Author by the act of imparting these gifts through inspiration, breathing, the very source of our being and life.

An Advent Hunger: Diary of a Short Fast

MARGARET PAYNE

A Lutheran pastor and mother of four children undertakes a one-day fast that has lasting results. When you hear her story, you will have new compassion for the millions of people in the world who go hungry each day—and you may want to add fasting to your own spiritual practice.

December 12, 1989

6:45 a.m. Deep sleep is ending, and I am drifting into that time when dreams are still more real, but the pull of the new day is beginning to have its way with my reluctant spirit. It is the coldest morning that we have had so far this fall, and my nest of flannel sheets and bunched-up quilt is clearly the best place to be. Getting up will also mean stepping back into the non-stop pace that characterizes the life of a parish pastor, wife, and mother of four when there are two weeks to go before Christmas and it is not one of those years when cookies are already in the freezer and sermons already written. Bed is a tempting alternative.

The sudden remembering comes like a rude poke: today is the day that I plan to fast. It was not my own idea, but a suggestion made to the entire congregation by our Social Ministry Chairperson. She stood up one day after worship and announced that the local soup kitchen had requested those who were willing to fast for one day, both to experience solidarity with people who are hungry, and to send the money that the food would have cost as a contribution toward their special Christmas meal.

As the pastor, I gave support to the idea, this simple and brief exercise of discipline and giving. I encouraged everyone to consider it, but did not tell them that I had decided to give it a try. After all, I reasoned to myself, it would be an undue pressure on them, suggesting that they should follow my lead. But the truth was that I was afraid that I would fail, and did not want anyone to know about it. I love to eat.

7:00 a.m. Out of bed to check on the kids, and make sure that they are up and moving. Downstairs in the kitchen the wood stove is grunting softly as it labors to produce a circle of warmth against this bitter day,

A graduate of Muhlenberg College and Princeton Theological Seminary, Margaret Payne is Co-pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Hightstown, NJ.

and there is coffee already made in the pot. I remind myself that there is at least this benefit for me from a husband who has to be outside on a rink at 6:00 a.m. two mornings a week to coach his ice hockey team. I pour a cup of coffee gratefully, and sit for a moment looking out the window.

I have decided that I will take liquids today, but no solid food. Is that cheating? Who writes the rules for fasts? I feel a twinge of guilt enjoying my normal morning coffee, but I suspect that difficult hours are on their way, and the sugar and caffeine will give me some energy. But what if I were without any of these familiar and warm comforts, and beginning the day with a cup of cold water?

It does not seem unusual to the children that I am not eating, for I often eat after they leave. It escapes them that I am gazing longingly at their granola, and noticing for the first time that when butter sinks into warm toast at just the right moment, the final, fragrant product is almost irresistible. They finish and are gone in a wild tumble of gathering up books, finding matching mittens, and hoping out loud that the school bus is late because of ice on the road. The warm and emphasized silence that they leave behind is just the right climate for my first fully-awake encounter with the commitment that I have made, which is already being contested by the grumble of an unwilling belly. I should have eaten more last night.

7:45 a.m. I sit down to my devotions, and suddenly it becomes clear that Advent *should* be a time of hungering, for God, and that a fast is a more appropriate tool of spiritual preparation than I had realized. How often during this season are we so glutted with a steady diet of activity and satisfactions that we never really experience any hunger, or any space that can be filled only by God? Even worship and parish commitments can occupy our minds and spirits in a busyness that crowds out the deeply-felt longing for the appearance of the Christ-child, who brings the hope of new life. Any new life must begin in pain to some degree, and in the leaving behind of the protected and steady nourishment of the womb. Yet so often we insist that there be no pain or hunger, but only comfort, and thus pinch the vision to fit into our lives, and shrink from a true nativity. Absentmindedly, I open the little window for the day of one of our Advent calendars: it shows me a picture of a little boy eating a chocolate ice cream cone.

Haitian Family by S. Huffaker. Oil. 1986

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Please use the back of this sheet for your comments.

Why do men and women in 66 countries read *Fellowship in Prayer*? Our readers tell us:

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If you, too, find *Fellowship in Prayer* "a joy and inspiration" to read, won't you take a moment to read and fill in the other side of this page?

Paul Walsh
President
Fellowship in Prayer

9:50 a.m. The endless phone calls and many small jobs in the church office help to distract me from my hunger, and I am feeling rather self-righteous about my decision. I think that hunger will be a good teacher today, and I am ready to be a faithful student. I am tempted to tell someone about what I am doing, but decide that it might be best to stick with my original plan to keep silent.

11:20 a.m. I am so hungry that I could scream. Why on earth did I ever decide to do this useless thing? I feel reassured of my creative energy, however, for my mind is filled with a seemingly endless stream of reasons why it would be fine to have just a little bit to eat, and the fast would still be valid. The desire to have something to chew on, and to enjoy the taste of my favorite foods is stronger than the hunger itself, and it feels almost demonic. I feel foolish, though, when I think that I am experiencing only the frustrated longing of a normally well-fed person, and not the bone and soul shrinking hunger that many people live with every day, and at this very moment.

2:15 p.m. In reaching down inside myself for the strength to keep this commitment, it is becoming a day of prayer. I had not expected that. I am so aware of my hunger, and the danger that I will give in to the temptation to eat, that I have to keep in constant touch with the reasoning of my spirit, not just my mind. Also, I am coming to understand that I cannot keep this fast alone. The grumbles of my stomach have become calls to prayer, as loud and insistent as any bells would be, and it is only when I respond that I feel sure that I will have the strength to make it through the day. Always before, my prayers had been brief and sporadic and kept carefully in their designated place. Now they are part of the rhythm of my body, and are constant.

3:45 p.m. Oh no. Today is grocery shopping day, and I have to do it because there is practically no food in the house for my husband and children, who are most definitely not fasting at this particular time. I will do the shopping, but decide that I cannot make the Christmas cookies that I had planned for this afternoon. I know my limits; I would never make it through without eating some of the dough.

5:35 p.m. I just returned from my exercise class. I decided to go despite the fear that it would increase my hunger unbearably, but it turned out that it was not so difficult after all. In fact, I realize now that I was more

in touch with my body, having eaten less, than times when the class was a frenzied effort to work off the extra pounds that I knew I had gained. It was a time of deeper communication and connection between body and spirit, and I felt strangely at peace and more whole. Right now the hunger has a familiarity that is not all unpleasant. I tell the children that I have already eaten, and listen as they compete to tell me about their day while they eat dinner; I am not tempted to join them.

7:52 p.m. My hunger is both a gift and a wound, and my whole self is curled around it. Throughout the day it has been my teacher, but also my enemy, and occasionally my friend. It has separated me from other people, but in a way that makes me see them more clearly, and with a patience that is unusual for me.

If I were always and hopelessly hungry, it would consume me in a destructive way, dismantling body and spirit and the ability to embrace the fullness of life. But this small hunger of mine consumes only enough of me to nibble away some of the ragged edges. It makes me feel more even and controlled. This longing which has become my companion for the day hints at a deeper reality, perhaps whose messages and revelations are clouded by my preoccupation with all that I insist on putting into my mouth. Thus I am often sated, and there is no space for anything else.

"I am coming to understand that I cannot keep this fast alone. The grumbles of my stomach have become calls to prayer, as loud and insistent as any bells would be, and it is only when I respond that I feel sure that I will have the strength to make it through the day."

10:30 p.m. Despite all the valuable things that I have learned today, I am already beginning to think about what I will eat tomorrow, and looking forward to it with eager anticipation. This is my last temptation, the time when I often have a snack after a tiring meeting, just before bed-time. Although the day has been one of insight, it has also been a struggle, and I will be glad when the struggle is over.

But what if I were going to be hungry tomorrow, too? What if my hunger went on and on? I must not let myself forget that this experience is not meant to be only for my own spiritual stretching, but also as a reminder that so many people suffer daily the totally consuming kind of hunger that I will never know. There have to be connections among all the kinds of longing, and all the hungers. Longing for a deeper knowl-

edge of Christ must go hand-in-hand with longing for food to satisfy the physical hunger of all those who are suffering, or else it is a longing that is closed and self-centered.

11:20 p.m. Finally into bed and able to snuggle back down into the warmth after a cold and tiring day. I have been irritable for this last hour, but now I feel a sense of relief, accompanied by a strange and gnawing kind of peace. I am glad that I decided to try this fast, but I feel a little foolish that such a short and simple discipline seemed so demanding to me. My last fear: I wonder if the hunger will keep me awake?

Epilogue. I fell asleep shortly after that last thought, and so my hunger obviously did not join forces with insomnia to add sleeplessness to my discomfort. Food tasted wonderful the next day, although I was not as hungry as I thought that I would be. I missed my companion hunger, in a way, although not enough to invite it back again. I did eat less than usual, and found that less is sufficient.

After sending my money to the soup kitchen, and reading over the notes that I had made about the day, I decided that it was a more private journey than I had expected, and not one that I could share easily with others. So I put away the notes, and never told anyone that I had fasted, or asked anyone in my congregation if they had given it a try. Somehow it seemed impossible to talk about it in any but the most superficial way.

My short fast left me humble, for although I made it through the day, I learned that fasting is not something that I can do easily or well. And it left me with another kind of hunger. This strange and embryonic hunger came to live within me sometime during that day, as surely as if I had been impregnated, although I did not realize its presence right away. Gradually I became aware of it as a mysterious and only vaguely discernible guest, apparent in some of my times of prayer. It has not yet grown very much, although I turn inward to search for its tiny body sometimes when I feel too full of clutter to trust my usual instincts for direction, or to understand how God is calling me. It has a message for me, this hunger, but I need to find ways to enable it to grow before it will be able to communicate all that it has to teach. Perhaps this exercise of remembering my fast, its strange beckoning and powerful lessons, will be the way to begin the growing and honoring of this strange, young hunger, and the way to understand it.

Morning Walk Prayers

MEREDITH GOULD

Here is a flawless way to take the drudgery out of your daily exercise and make it come vibrantly alive!

I groaned when my doctor said, "walk." It didn't matter that I was young (as I approach my fortieth birthday, middle age seems young) and able-bodied. He said "walk" and I heard "chore." I'm well over that now. It's more than one year later and I cherish my morning walks, and not just because walking releases endorphins. There's much more to it. I've discovered the power of meditative walking. Like the rest of my prayer life, that realization was delightfully unexpected and most welcomed.

Once I started walking, I began to appreciate that it was not a separate activity, something to hustle through before engaging in my real spiritual practices. It was all *sadhana*, including the walking, which—especially when I walked many miles and felt it physically throughout the day—clearly aligned body, mind and spirit. Walking itself was prayer, meditation and yoga. Once I understood this, I changed how I defined what was going on in my head. Thoughts became emanations.

This is not to say I didn't think of things to do while walking. I would often, especially at the beginning, return home with lists of phone calls to make or things to buy, but even that level of mind-chatter eventually dropped off.

Shopping lists gave way to sundry mantras, snippets from psalms and, thanks to a diligent tenth grade teacher, entire poems. But soon, those gave way to my own prayers, or what I like to think of as God's voice expressed in my particular language of devotion.

Simple prayers of gratitude would come as I walked, surrounded by birdsong, into the summer's light:

Gracious God
Live in my heart
as I grow in your world.

A journalist with a doctorate in sociology, Meredith Gould is also an aspiring yogini in the Kripalu tradition.

David Martosko

More complex prayers of petition would seem to manifest during darker walks:

Lord help me relax
in your loving arms,
the world around me,
your loving creation.

My devotion to you is
the path to my Self.
Lead me through quiet dark doubts.
Warm me through sudden icy fears.

And on the days when I'd walk without glasses, with nothing much in focus, my other senses heightened, prayers of surrender would emerge more readily:

Lord, you are love everlasting
Lord, you are truth now and for ever
Lord, you are life in life and death.

O divine teacher,
teach me the lessons of love,
show me the path of truth,
manifest in my life.

My routes would change from day to day. Without planning, I'd invariably choose the absolutely right path, sometimes walking into the light, sometimes away from it. Sometimes I'd walk through town, connecting with the world of commerce and service. Other times I'd walk in nature, connecting with the world of spirit. Under any and all circumstances, my morning walks became a time of union with God-as-manifest in everything—even while walking at a clip. Sometimes I'd hear each footstep, but more often than not, being and doing would merge, providing the transcendental experience I always longed for and didn't quite get during sitting meditation. In those moments, prayers of revelation, like this one, would appear:

If I live in your love, Lord
each moment is different,
this one is this
the next one is next.

If I live in your life, Lord
each moment is special,
this one is bright
the next brighter yet.

If I live by your word, Lord
each moment is filled
with harmony, love and light.

It recently occurred to me that I had discovered what spiritual seekers have known for centuries about the evocative power of walking. Prayer is everywhere, just waiting to be called forth. You can take a walk and experience this for yourself, if you haven't already.

A Christmas Message

SHIRLEY ANNE BRIGGS

Christmas reminds people everywhere that miracles are possible. It is even possible to look in the mirror and find God reflected there.

Christmas!—the time of hope, rebirth, and new beginnings. This day literally jumps out at us with fresh sparkling cleanness stating that no matter what our past has been, Christmas wipes the canvas clean for us to paint a new picture. Christmas teaches us that miracles are possible. It gives us the motivation to pull a cherished dream from the dusty corners of our mind, to polish it, and to reach out to try once again to make the dream a reality in our life. Yes, the Christmas spirit is like this.

Let's go on a visualization trip and script our life in any manner we desire. All our favorite people are a part of our world. We get along in perfect harmony with everyone we meet. We have limitless amounts of money. The weather is always just as we desire it to be. Our health is superb. We are enjoying our perfect employment. We add all the details to personalize our visualization and to make our life just as wonderful as our mind can imagine it to be.

Let's go one step further and erase crime, poverty, illness, and war. There is a reverence for, and respect of, all forms of life. The world is at peace.

As we bask in the lovely scene we have created and enjoy its beauty, we notice that there still seems to be an area of discontent inside our being. Something is missing. We wonder where this hunger is coming from.

No matter what we establish that is right and good on the outside, unless we feel an inner connection with God we will never find peace and contentment. All the desires in our heart are but a cry from our spirit which is trying to lead us home. As we come to the realization that nothing in our outer life will ever satisfy us for long, we recognize our Oneness with God, and find the peace we are seeking.

The story is told of two artists who approached a king, each seeking

Shirley Anne Briggs publishes the "Circle of Love." For a complimentary copy, write to her at 204 W. Van Emmon St., Yorkville, IL 60560.

exclusive rights for the opportunity to decorate the walls of the king's palace. The king decided to examine their work and they were asked to paint two opposite walls.

Screens were placed before the walls in such a way that the artists could work independently of one another. They worked for several weeks. At the end of that time one artist came to the king mentioning his work was ready to be examined. The king asked the second artist how much longer it would be before he was finished. He replied that his work was complete.

The king, his retinue and other visitors, came to see which of the artists had outrivaled the other. The screen before the wall of the first artist was taken down. The work was found to be spectacular and beautiful. They could not find the words with which to express what they were seeing. Everyone agreed that it was a masterpiece.

The courtiers mentioned to the king that nothing could be finer. They could see no reason to even look at the work of the second artist. The king being wiser than his courtiers, ordered the screen to be removed from the second wall. The people gasped in wonder and amazement by what they saw. The work was marvelous.

The second artist had placed nothing on his wall. He had made the wall transparent by sanding, rubbing, and scrubbing. Everything painted on the opposite wall by his rival was reflected in beautiful perfection. The first artist's wall actually appeared to be rough, uneven, and ugly by comparison. The second artist had created a mirror which reflected all the beauty of the first wall in greatly enhanced smoothness and clarity.

Our souls are similar to the wall of the second artist. Whatever we dwell upon we become. Our faces are sculptured by our thoughts. We cannot hide what we are. As we place our mind and our thought on Christ-Jesus, we reflect this Spirit and discover we have the very qualities that we so admire and love in the Master Teacher.

As we become aware that Christ-Jesus lives in us, as us, we discover that we rise in Spirit above every difficulty. We find ourselves experiencing peace regardless of what is playing on the screen of our life. Our True Place becomes clear and our life reflects God's Divine Plan for us. We have risen above the human level and live in the Presence of God. We may have thought that we were human beings trying to become spiritual. We now know that the reverse is true and that we are spiritual beings attempting to live in a human world.

Lauren Ford

Christ-Jesus comes to us to be our Wayshower. He gives Himself as an example of what we can become. He states in John 14.12: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and *greater works* than these shall he do . . ."

As we live in this manner we find that the Master Teacher is thinking through our mind; dwelling in our heart to the extent that we see the Divine in everyone we meet. We step aside and give all desire to control ourselves and others to this Presence. God has become the Senior Partner in all our activities. When we don't know where to go or what to do, we ask God to please show us the way. As we practice the Presence of God we discover that our lives, like the artist's mirror, become more and more the reflected beauty of the Christ-Jesus Spirit. We have succeeded in transforming our life into a masterpiece. We take the Christ-realized Self of us into our daily life and create a paradise right here and now.

The Master Teacher mentions in John 18.36: ". . . My Kingdom is not of this world . . ." Neither is mine. Neither is yours. Merry Christmas!

Ask Angela

BARBARA ACKERMAN

Do you have a question of the heart or spirit that needs attention? Angela would love to help. Please write to her c/o F.i.P., 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08540, and she will give you her answer in our next issue.

Dear Angela,

What are your dreams and desires for the coming year?

Curiously yours,
S. Claus

Dear S. Claus,

Thank you for taking the time to write to me. I deeply appreciate your personal interest and curiosity in my wishes and hopes for the New Year. Before I begin, let me say that I have been a very good girl and I do not need any old slippers this time, thanks.

I hope that all of the members of my family, including me, continue to feel happy and zippy in the New Year. I will be turning fourteen, so I have a special wish that I may be an older American pup with grace and dignity. I hope that we experience more commitment from each other to do what we can so Mother Earth begins to feel happy and zippy herself. I would like more shade trees, less pavement underpaw, and less cement around us in the summertime. For the New Year I hope for cleaner air to sniff, chemical-free lawns to investigate, and cool, unpolluted water to drink. I would also like more slightly stale French bread to chomp on and definitely less wind chill. I dream of an unwashed blanket in every room so I may snuggle anywhere at a moment's notice and not have to sniff the aroma of Tide.

In the New Year I hope that each of us has a few good views to enjoy and at least one beloved place to walk to with a friend, where we feel joined to each other and to Mother Earth. I hope that this year will be a

Barbara Ackerman, a friend of our canine sage-in-residence, says that she loves books almost as much as she loves dogs. She lives, writes, and befriends dogs in Princeton, NJ.

year marked by fewer fleas and flea baths and more regular doses of macaroni and cheese sauce.

I hope that humans will be able to live more relaxed lives and that people will have ample time to get things done but also have time to be kind to each other. In the New Year I hope that every one of us will experience the kinder, gentler nation that is so often spoken of but which seems so elusive. For the coming year it is my deepest desire to be able to squish myself small enough to fit *underneath* the living room couch.

I hope everyone has a best buddy to sit and be with for part of a day where both of you are free to not accomplish anything. I hope too that my own best buddy Barbara comes to see me as often as she can and that we continue to share walks, Cheerios, and an occasional meditative snooze together, and that there will be more of those long, luxurious chest rubs.

In the New Year I hope that families thinking about getting a puppy will consider getting one from a shelter, pound, or humane society. I hope too that the idea of joining dogs and older retired people will catch on as the winning combination that it is.

Finally, I hope that in the coming year less boring food will hit my kitchen floor. At home I hope we get back to basics: back to the beef, the chicken, and the liverwurst in life.

To all of my friends and fans I wish you time to be, time to sniff and snooze peacefully.

Faithfully,
Angela

Sacerdotal Season

Across the landscape rests the snow
Like altar linens on the stone of martyrs,
Course kept, faith fulfilled.
At winter solstice I stand, a man, and censer
With my heart the sinking sun,
Wan promise of a tenuous tomorrow,
While on the morn—St. Thomas Day—
I breathe, a priest,
A rising Son into the crushed grape
And cloven grain, a healing Son
That lo! makes all things new
And warms the stone and glitters the snow
And plumps the heart with pledge
Of an endless today.

Francis X. Canfield

Sing to the Spirit

Sing to the Spirit of Love, he is singing to you.
Under your mind he sings the whole day long,
deep in your heart he sings the whole night through,
a clear, compelling song.

Answer him then with the song he longs to hear.
Striving against the mind's too human whim,
soaring beyond the heart's most secret fear,
surrender to him.

Sing to the Spirit of God, O sing to him now.
He is waiting for you as a lover waits for his bride.
Sing with the fullness of love only death will allow,
Self must be crucified.

Eileen Surles

Francis Canfield is pastor of St. Paul Parish in Grosse Pointe Farms, MI. In June he received the University of Michigan's Distinguished Alumnus Award.

A highly acclaimed poet, Eileen Surles is a Religious of the Cenacle in Chicago, IL.

Presence-availability

ROSEMARIE CARFAGNA

"Presence" and "availability" are words we all understand. But what do they mean when you put them together?

Minutes before a big event on our campus recently there was a major power outage. In murky darkness we welcomed about two hundred students, family members and guests. Campus ministers, faculty members, staff and administrators groped toward each other, some holding candles, some guided only by the sounds of others' voices. The event went well, perhaps better than it might have under more conventional circumstances. The experience of groping toward each other in the dark struck me as an irresistible metaphor for the spiritual disposition of presence-availability that underlies contemplative prayer. Whether it is found in meditation, ministry, counseling or friendship, the disposition of presence-availability provides a consistent attitude that enhances our spirituality and submits it to God.

Presence implies living in the presence of God so that we are ever aware of God's being there. It refers to our consciousness of God in the vivid present. *Availability* implies offering God what we are. Presence is God's gift to us; availability is our gift to God. Together these two attitudes yield presence-availability, which implies offering ourselves not only to God but also to others because of the love of God.

Presence-availability is a disposition of one's mind. It can be likened to that of a contemplative who sits at attention, waiting for the inspiration of God and ready to serve, not knowing what God may ask, or to what use they will be put. The activity of the contemplative is identical to that of one who gropes in the dark. Neither person knows where they are going. God may never tell the contemplative of any specific plan, yet the person, at attention and ready to serve, plays an invaluable role in the accomplishment of God's will. Without the person's full attention and readiness to serve, God's plans may be hindered or may end in failure. Such is the role the person may play in allowing God's will to be done.

People who live in the state of presence-availability allow God to use them to attain spiritual ends that fit into God's will. Without the person's

Rosemarie Carfagna is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Ursuline College in Pepper Pike, OH.

full attention and readiness to serve, God's plans may be hindered or may end in failure. Such is the role the person may play in allowing God's will to be done.

People who live in the state of presence-availability allow God to use them to attain spiritual ends that fit into God's will or plans. They may never know that they are being used, or to what end they are being used. They remain in the dark. This does not matter, for it is availability that counts and not ability. God then can use these persons spiritually to effect the divine will. The spiritual use of such persons varies with each individual soul. When one does not give presence-availability, God's work is hindered. Such is the importance contemplatives have in spiritual matters.

No matter what our state in life, we must learn to put God first in our minds and hearts, before ourselves and before any other. When we put God first, all relationships and events in our lives can be of benefit to ourselves and to others, whether or not this is apparent to us. Like groping in the dark, living in presence-availability requires much faith. It is

Tom Dunham

out of faith that hope arises. Hope, the expectation of the occurrence of good, is fundamental to life in God, since God is goodness itself. To come to have this faith and hope essential for life in God requires a general positive response to all events in our lives as coming from or being permitted by God, whether or not the events are agreeable or understandable to us.

To have a positive disposition generally does not mean that we are always acquiescent to events or to the behavior of others. In truth, this is why the mental state of presence-availability is indispensable to our sanctity. The state of sanctity requires that our whole lives be centered in God, who will then direct us in life's affairs. To rely on our own powers to decide what is moral or not or loving or not is foolishness. It is part of the human condition to think there is morality where there is not, and to think there is love where there is not. With God there may be morality and love when the human being thinks otherwise. Indeed, with God there may be immorality and selfish love when the human being truly thinks he or she is behaving morally or lovingly. Therefore, we cannot rely on our own often deceptive conceptions or our abilities to discern these things.

By cultivating the contemplative attitude of presence-availability, we strive to make ourselves perfectly available to God. When we do this, our powers and abilities are directed in accordance with God's will for us and for others. We live in peace and will have life everlasting. That is what is meant by presence-availability. It is part of a spirituality of contemplative surrender that strongly resembles the experience of groping in the dark. At the heart of this disposition is the giving up of self-will. The giving up of one's will lovingly, freely and absolutely to God is the ultimate act of love that human beings can make. While our salvation depends finally on God's grace and mercy, the last barrier that must be overcome is the giving up of our narcissistic attachment to ourselves. Living in an attitude of presence-availability facilitates this surrender. If we wish to be contented, we need to seek emotional satisfaction from God first, and to desire only God. Only then will we find in our hearts the peace and happiness that we seek.

It is both delusional and a form of pride to think that we won't be tempted to ignore God's will, no matter how much spiritual progress we have made. If we think we are not or cannot be tempted, we can be sure that we are. It is better to seek humility than to shun it, for humility is

essential to spiritual progress. That is, we are progressing toward perfection when we are less "of ourselves" and more "of God."

Those who desire to practice contemplative prayer are aware of the dynamics I have described. As they grope in darkness and in faith they know the warmth and support God gives in that darkness. They have experienced the joy and fulfillment that come from living in presence-availability, forgetting themselves, and loving infinitely.

Paul M. Schrack

A dull job became enjoyable. Pain became bearable. Difficult relationships became a matter of joyful giving and receiving. But the path toward this truly transformed life was steep and hard.

Please send the story of your own "transforming experience" (typed and double spaced), to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.

On the Way to Understanding

MARIANNA KANE NEAL

Two years ago I had cancer. I know that I am a better person today because of my experience. I can look back and be grateful for all that it has taught me about living a fuller, more meaningful life. Nevertheless, the truth is that I would give up all these opportunities for growth to have never had cancer.

I used to bury that thought. Today, it can most easily bring tears to my eyes. I'm not sure why. Perhaps it's the fear that cancer could reoccur. Perhaps it recalls memories of the emptiness I felt in spite of all that friends did to comfort and support me.

Since the cancer my life has changed dramatically. For example, I had longed for retirement, but now the job I once took for granted has gained a new meaning. Today I am surprised at the enthusiasm and joy work often brings me. Also, learning to let others minister to me is something new. It has been very difficult, yet how important it is! I am better able to reach out to those who are hurting and to understand their uneasiness. Words to people who hurt seem to flow more easily.

And I have become more capable of facing suffering. When my father was dying I couldn't face being alone with him. My reactions hurt me but I couldn't handle the intensity of the situation. I was too immature emotionally to allow him the peace of sharing a quiet moment alone with his daughter.

Reflecting on who I am now and who I was then amazes me. Although I'm still the same person I know that there IS a Divine Force

A free-lance writer in Fairborn, OH, Marianna Neal has masters degrees in counseling and theology.

unceasingly working in my life. I see God's hand working in ways I never would have expected or prayed for. God may not have healed my body but has healed areas in my life much more malignant than any tumor.

I remember the first days after I discovered I had cancer. The days were difficult but the nights seemed unbearable and never-ending. One thought filled my mind—I am guilty! I felt guilty for things I should have done and things I should never have done. I was being punished. God, the judge, was finally getting even with me for the life I had been leading. I prayed to be forgiven for my sins and for the guilt and disease to be lifted from my weary body. Like the paralytic in chapter 2 of Mark's gospel I longed to hear Jesus say "your sins are forgiven." If I could only be forgiven I'd be healed!

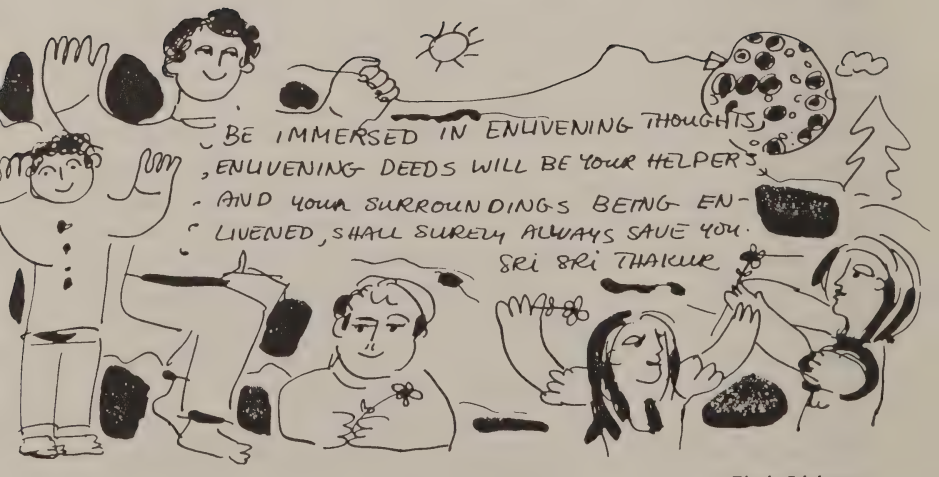
I had never put myself into that story before. It had just been a nice story that had amused me when I thought about it. Now I imagined how the paralyzed man felt allowing others to do for him, to take him places, to extend love to him. I still couldn't do any of those things. That was the realization that eventually helped the story become part of me. The man would never have been healed if he had insisted on being in control of his life rather than allowing others to minister to him. "Where did I come up with that idea?" I wondered. But I knew instinctively Who was moving in my life and Who had still not given up on me.

As I became able to reach out to others it was they who showed me how to allow my life to be healed. They helped me understand that both the man on the stretcher in Mark's gospel and I were paralyzed—with guilt for sins that had already been forgiven. If only we could forgive ourselves we would be able to allow healing to enter our lives. Christ reminded the paralytic that his sins WERE forgiven and my friends reminded me.

What was originally a source of fear, anger and depression became a real source of strength and change for me. Cancer simplified my life in many ways. My prayer life reflects these changes. I used to struggle to "get all the words in" and often felt frustrated as I rushed to finish prayer before work or sleep. Today my prayer rarely involves words. I no longer struggle to find God in special times that I set aside for formal prayer. The Spirit of God pervades every corner of my world.

And yet, despite all the positive signs I see manifested in my life, I wish I had never had cancer. I still ask why. I'm not sure of the answer and perhaps never will be, but I think it's because I needed the challenge my

illness gave me, the challenge to pick up my own pallet and to recognize the many areas in my life where I had been spiritually paralyzed. I've been asked to do a lot of different things in the past two years: to reach out to people in ways that are new to me, to allow others to minister to me, to become more open and sharing, and to accept myself as a forgiven child of God. At times the newness is overwhelming, but I pray to understand my "whys" a bit more each day and trust that I will continue to find strength and rebirth in God's never-ending presence.


BE IMMERSED IN ENLIVENING THOUGHTS,
ENLIVENING DEEDS WILL BE YOUR HELPERS
AND YOUR SURROUNDINGS BEING EN-
LIVENED, SHALL SURELY ALWAYS SAVE YOU.
SRI SRI THAKUR

Gisela Lichtgarn

The Abbey of Regina Laudis

JOY BERGMAN

A reader describes her favorite place of retreat. If you would like people to know about yours, write to The Editor, FiP, 291 Witherspoon St., Princeton, NJ 08542

Tucked away among the Connecticut hills, in the small town of Bethlehem, is a Benedictine Abbey called "Regina Laudis," which means "Queen of Praise." I have been going there for more than 20 years and have experienced great peace and love and joy.

The nuns of Regina Laudis still wear long loose-fitting habits of black and white, and when they work in their gardens, where they grow flowers, fruit, and herbs, they wear long blue denim habits. During the day, and in the middle of the night, they sing songs of praise to God in Latin. Vegetarians, they have their own dairy, grow vegetables and bake their own bread. One of the nuns, Mother Stephen, does all the plowing.

The Mother Superior and founder, Mother Benedict Duss, is a rare and exceptional woman. She grew up in France, graduated from medical school and trained to be a surgeon but never practiced surgery. Instead she entered the French Abbey of Jouarre, which she left in 1946 to come back to America and found Regina Laudis. The movie "Come to the Stable" with Loretta Young is based on the founding of Regina Laudis.

The nuns have uncommon talents. Two are stained glass designers. (You can see their work in the gift shop and at the chapel entrance.) Another carved a very beautiful carrara marble fountain, which is to be seen at the chapel entrance. Mother Placid designed an outdoor stage, and Mother Agnes is both Beekeeper and Librarian. Mother Dolores Hart was a film actress of some note in Hollywood. (I saw her in the Broadway play "The Pleasure of His Company" with Cyril Ritchard.) Margaret Patton, granddaughter of General Patton, is a Novice.

The figures of the creche were donated by Loretta Howard, who gave a similar set to decorate the Christmas tree at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They are early 18th century Neapolitan.

If you would like to arrange a visit, write to the Guest Mistress, Abbey of Regina Laudis, Bethlehem, CT 06751.

Joy Bergman founded the American Theatre for children.

EVELYN UNDERHILL: ARTIST OF THE INFINITE LIFE
by Dana Greene, Crossroad, New York, 1990, 179 pages, hardback, $18.95.

Almost 50 years after her death, Evelyn Underhill is regarded as one of our century's most important writers on mysticism and the spiritual life. Famous in her time as the author of 40 books and 350 shorter works, she devoted her life to opening doors on "the Absolute." The religious historian, Horton Davies, wrote that Underhill's classic book, *Mysticism*, has been more widely read and more influential than any other work in the field of spirituality. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, said that she "did more than anyone else to keep the spiritual life alive in the Anglican Church in the period between the wars." Today her approach is more relevant than ever. Her writing is full of joyful feeling but without the excessive emotionality that characterizes much of contemporary religion. Underhill believed that one who seeks God finds, but the whole person—mind, heart and will—must be engaged in the quest.

Truly "an artist of the infinite life," she wrote books full of beauty and grace, which are reflected in her biography and make it well worth reading.

EVELYN UNDERHILL: THE WAYS OF THE SPIRIT
edited by Grace Adolphsen Brame, Crossroads, New York, 1990, 247 pages, hardback, $19.95.

One of the great authorities on the spiritual life, Evelyn Underhill was also a gifted and prominent public speaker who lectured in theology, spoke on radio, and conducted retreats in her native England for both clergy and laity. Friends and critics alike agree that she raised the position of women in religion probably more than anyone else in the 20th century. Four of her unpublished retreats were discovered by Dr. Grace Brame while looking through the Underhill archives in London. Written in the highest octaves of the human spirit, the manuscript takes up such favorite themes of Underhill's as love and sanctity, inner grace, and the call of God. These uplifting writings show that Underhill understood the world's immense need for contemplation (as T. S. Eliot said), and knew how to lead others to "the country of everlasting clearness" where she had found God.

We welcome your comments. Please send them to the Editor, FiP, *291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.*

It is always a pleasure to receive *Fellowship in Prayer*—but this last issue was a special gift to me. Thank you for the moving articles on Mother Earth—and for the insights Angela shared with all of us!

As usual, the wisdom of the articles stirred my mind and heart. I spent much time thinking about the blessings of the earth that I had recognized in the past—and those I did not notice. There is much yet to think about, to mull over, to link up with. The issue will be at my fingertips for some time to come.

THANK YOU for helping me to think of the earth and all of creation—and to recognize my kinship with all of that.

My prayer for you is peace.

Jerome B. Robben; Pacific, MO

FiP is a blessed little book! Thank you!

Cheryl Matteo; Port Hoywood, VA

I am sending your publication to a family that is grieving the death of a 15-year-old member. I am hopeful it will inspire some peace in their hearts. I *love* your publication!

Regina C. Sullivan; Bronx, NY

I'm afraid that much religious thought is tied into a tight little bundle by all the separate groups of organized religion. I am so happy to read [in *FiP*] articles which open the universe to God, who of course has been there all along.

Elfredo Marks; Emmetsburg, IA

As my contribution to Help Heal Mother Earth Day, I sent a letter to about 65 friends asking them to participate. I hope all went well that weekend in Princeton.

Elizabeth Grosch; Indiana, PA

I am an inmate at Florida State Prison, and I am writing to thank you for sending me *Fellowship in Prayer*. I enjoy reading your book and hope

to see it more, because I need all the help I can get now to stay on the right side of the road. Thank you.

Johnny P.; Strake, FLA

I appreciate *Fellowship in Prayer's* modest format and inspiring content. Thank you for your good work.

Russell Smith; Columbus, OH

As a Bahai, I greatly appreciate and enjoy your inclusion of other religious teachings than the one from which I sprang. You are one of the good things in our threatened world. Bless you!

Martha Erickson; W. St. Paul, MN

Your wonderful journal has been very helpful to me in my inner growth over the years.

Sybil C. Harp; Milwaukee, WI

Your publication achieves and promotes what your title recommends. World unity through prayer, spirituality, and awareness of "earthology" reach one's heart on reading *FiP.*

Clarice Lolich; Loma Linda, CA

Thank you for all your good work for the good of (the) *dharma.*

John Fredrich; Palo Alto, CA

I'm truly grateful for your journal. I've just mailed this past year's copies to a good friend who is librarian for her motherhouse community of Sisters of Charity at Emmitsburg, MD. I feel sure she will know who would like to read this wonderful publication.

I want to mention that there is another powerhouse of prayer: our Sisters who have retired from active ministry as teachers, preachers, and ministers in hospitals and orphanages.

May your word continue to touch the lives of many people to bring them closer to our loving God and to one another.

S. Vincentius

Thanks for the beauty and authenticity in your publication.

Margo R. Cooke; Lexington, KY

FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER, INC.

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Princeton, New Jersey 08542

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